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Cela,pattikā Vatthu

The case of the cloth-strips | Cv 5.21.1-4

Theme: Monastics should inspire faith and happiness in others

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2019

1 Summary and significance

1.1 SUMMARY and note

1.1.1 The Cela,pattikā Vatthu (Cv 5.21.1-4) is the origin-story behind the Vinaya rule made by Buddha regarding monastics stepping on white cloths as an act of good fortune for the laity. Narratively, this story clearly follows the events related in **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85), SD 55.2, where it is said that the Buddha declines to step on the white cloths spread out by prince Bodhi all over the floor of his newly built palace in the hope, with the Buddha stepping on it, he will be blessed with a child that he is longing for.

1.1.2 The compound *cela,pattikā*¹ is found in the Culla,vagga (Cv 5.21.2.1-4).² Since it is often used there-in, it has been used in the story title (which does not have one in the texts). The word *cela,pattikā* also appears as *cela,paṭikā* (with the variant *ceḷa,paṭikā*) in the Vinaya Commentary (VA 1209,13). There the compound is explained as “cloth-covering” (*ceḷa,santhāraṃ*, VA 1209,13). In fact, *santhāra* has a broad range of senses: “covering, spreading, floor(ing).”

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 No obligation to acquiesce

1.2.1.1 By the sentence, “**The Tathagata regards posterity with compassion**” [§23], is meant that the Buddha does not want to set a precedent of burdening the monastics with the obligation of acquiescing to the requests of the laity in their worldly needs. By not stepping on the white cloths as prince Bodhi has requested, the Buddha is making such a statement: monastics should not respond to the worldly wants of the laity. Their task is to guide and inspire the laity in spiritual matters, that is, to be free of the suffering of samsara.³

1.2.1.2 Hence, the Buddha promulgates **the Vinaya rule** that monastics should have nothing to do with the ritual of stepping on cloths [§29]. In hindsight, we can see that the Buddha is quite adamant about how far he will go in responding to worldly requests, and his limits are clear. [2.1.1]

The 3rd rule (that is, the 2nd revision to the cloth-rule), is a practical one: “I allow, bhikshus, the stepping on clean cloth (for drying the feet after washing).” (§35). This rule is quite straightforward and is often observed in traditional Theravāda Buddhist circles even today.

¹ V 2:128,29 *cela,pattikāṃ*, V 2:129,4 *cela,pattikā*; VA 1209,13 *ceḷa,paṭikāṃ*.

² Respectively, V 2:128,29 + 129,4+12+16.

³ Granoff curiously remarks that “a monk may step on the cloth offered by a woman who has just had a miscarriage ... behind this might lie a belief in the fructifying power of the monk’s touch” (2002:200n 39). There are at least 2 glaring errors here: (1) there is no such rule (§34); (2) Saṅghādisesa 2 forbids monks from having any physical contact with any women (V 3:120,33-36).

1.2.1.3 The Mahīśāsaka⁴ Vinaya, however, differs from the Pali Vinaya: it does *not* relate the case of cloth-stepping at all. The problem, records this Vinaya, was that the monks made a mess when partaking of the food offered by prince Bodhi. This behavior resulted in the laity to criticize the monks, which led the Buddha to lay down a rule that food should be received and partaken of in a proper manner.⁵

1.2.2 Inspiring faith and hope

1.2.2.1 However, in due course, there is a case of a laywoman who has lost a child through miscarriage, and so wishes for another. She requests the monks to step on the cloths she has spread out with the hope of fulfilling her wish. The monks, being prudent, refuse to do so. She complains that the monks are being scrupulous, that is, being insensitive and uncompassionate.

The Buddha, considering the woman's burden of pain and of their belief that an external agency (the monks) are able to grant her this good fortune, does not want her to harbour unwholesome thoughts towards the monks, and so creating even more bad karma by her own negative thoughts.

1.2.2.2 It seems as if the Buddha, in his compassion, is willing to go back on his own word. But the truth remains that he makes *no* such statement. The significance of his not stepping on white cloths stands as it is. However, in his wisdom and compassion, he allows monastics to make a skillful gesture when it helps the laity, despite their superstition, to feel a sense of **hope** that their wish may be granted. In other words, monastics should inspire faith, confidence and hope in the laity.

1.2.2.3 The Vinaya rules in this connection should not be misconstrued as “rules of obligation” or even “rules of commission” (that a monastic *must* step on white cloths when requested). The word and spirit of the related rules are clear: they are merely **rules of latitude**: the Buddha “allows” monastics to step on white cloths as a gesture of allowing “good fortune” in the *superstitious* layperson who believes in it. Hence, declares the Buddha, “I allow (you), bhikshus, when beseeched by householders, for the sake of good fortune, to step on a cloth-spread.” (§34) [1.2.2.4]

Superstition, it should be understood, is the belief that the problems we face—despite being rooted in our own karma—is the belief that they could be resolved by our external action. However, this is only a doctrinal point. The more urgent rationale is that by acting in good faith—a monastic stepping on the white cloths—will prevent or stop unwholesome thoughts in the laity. The world-busy laity will, in time, move on to other issues, anyway, without the unwholesome burden of the notion that the sangha was “scrupulous.”

1.2.2.4 By “**rule of latitude**” is meant that a monastic is “allowed” to step on white cloths as requested by the laity, but the monastic is free to decide whether he wishes to do it or not. It is not a rule that he *must* oblige the laity. A wise monastic, for example, would use his wisdom or charisma to counsel or advise the concerned laity on the proper course of action.

It is, however, *inappropriate* for a monastic to even suggest that a person or couple should have a child again. This would be approving of others indulging in physical pleasures, which is the spirit of the 6th of the 7 “bonds of sexuality” (*methuna, saṃyoga*) which the Buddha warns about in **the Methuna Sutta** (A 7.47). Such a weakness would be for a monastic “a break, a tear, a mottle, a blotch of the holy life.”⁶

⁴ The Mahīśāsaka school was one of the major “18 schools” of early Buddhism (pre-Mahāyāna) thought to have been a 2nd-cent offshoot of the Vibhajjavādīn or the Sarvāstivādīn, and which in turn spawned the later Dharmaguptaka. Based on present knowledge of its Abhidharma doctrines, it may be a mainland Indian parent school connected to the Sri Lankan Theravādā. The Yogācāra exegete, Asaṅga, is said to have been ordained in this school.

⁵ Y1421 (T22.75c9).

⁶ *Brahmacariyassa khaṇḍam pi chiddam pi sabalam pi kammāsam pi* (A 7.47,7/4:55), SD 21.9.

Such worldly matters are best left in the hands of a capable lay Buddhist counsellor. Indeed, a monastic who is adept in sexual counselling would at once be suspect of being worldly himself. Indeed, such unwise dabbling in worldliness—even in the guise of people-helping—can bring an unawakened worldly monastic to break the very 1st “defeat” (*pārājika*) precept and so ending his celibate monastic life.⁷

1.2.3 The significance of the Vinaya accounts: see SD 55.5 (3.2.2).

2 A few interesting Pali words

2.1 PACCHIMĀ JANATĀ

2.1.1 The Vinaya

2.1.1.1 The phrase *pacchimā janatā* (literally, “the after-generation; the generations after (us),” “posterity,” occurs in various contexts in all the Nikāyas (except the Dīgha and the Khuddaka) and the Vinaya. In the Vinaya, the phrase occurs in the chapter on **Pārājika 2** (on taking the not-given). The occasion, however, relates to the prohibition against building a forest hut (or any structure) that would harm life.

Near the start of the chapter, the Vinaya tells us that Dhaniya the potter’s son (*dhaniya kumbhakāra,putta*)⁸ had built a hut from red clay (*mattikā*) that looked prettily ruddy like a ladybird. The Buddha, however, prohibits the building of huts made all of mud, since this entails the killing of numerous mud-dependent creatures.

2.1.1.2 In promulgating this rule prohibiting monastics **from building a hut all of clay** (*sabba,mattikā,maya*), the Buddha declares: “Let not posterity cause harm to living beings. And, bhikkhus, a hut all of clay should not be made. Whoever shall make one, there is an offence of wrong-doing.”⁹

The Vinaya Commentary glosses *pacchimā janatā* with “the generations” (*jana,samūha*, literally, “the aggregate of generations”). This sense of the phrase applies to it in our Vinaya account, where Ānanda declares before the Buddha: “**The Tathagata regards posterity with compassion**” (*pacchimam janatam tathāgato anukampatīti*) [§23]. Let us now examine the significance of this statement.

2.1.1.3 We see here **Ānanda**, in his wisdom, speaking as the Buddha’s spokesman, significantly as the link (as it were) between the timeless Dharma (represented by the Buddha) and the generations then and to come. There are at least two significant points we should note here.

The first is that **the Buddha** did not step on the cloths as requested by Prince Bodhi. This fact remains as the truth of the timeless Dharma. We should courageously face our karma, bad or good. The Dhamma teaches us to see the bigger picture: it is not Bodhi’s childlessness that is the issue, but rather the conditions behind it (what “caused” it) that should be understood and corrected. The Dhamma, then, is the path of self-knowing, self-righting and self-freeing.

Secondly, by not stepping on the cloths, the Buddha is highlighting **the purpose of his teaching**—not that of performing rituals or premonitory acts—but of freeing beings from samsara. Even if we could resurrect the dead, it only means that he would have to die again. Karma is an existential disease, a spiritual

⁷ On the 1st *pārājika*, see V 3:23,13-36.

⁸ Clearly, he is not identical to Dhaniya the herdsman (*go,pa*) of Sn 1.2 (SD 50.20).

⁹ *Mā pacchimā janatā pāṇesu pātavyam āpajji. Na ca bhikkhave sabba,mattikā,mayā kuṭikā kātabbā. Yo kareyya āpatti dukkatassāti* (Pār 2.1.2 @ V 3:42,17-19)

discomfort, we keep catching. We need to stay spiritually healthy so that we are not infected ever again. This is to head for the path of awakening that leads to the disease-free and karma-free, nirvana.¹⁰

2.1.2 The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 85)

2.1.2.1 The same sentence—“**The Tathagata regards posterity with compassion**” [§23]—appears in the same context in **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 85)** account of the Buddha not stepping on the cloths laid out by prince Bodhi. The Sutta version highlights its Dharma aspect. Apparently, prince Bodhi sees his childlessness as a disadvantage that affects his *whole life*. He declares: “Happiness is not to be found through pleasure; happiness is to be found through pain.”¹¹

2.1.2.2 Taking prince Bodhi’s wrong view [2.1.2.1] as the point of departure, the Buddha shows that actually the opposite is the liberating truth. Like the Bodhisattva, we should “**fear not the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states.**”¹² This statement marks the turning-point in the Bodhisattva’s quest—from seeking the ignoble, his quest is now for the noble, that of the joy and freedom of true awakening.

In fact, this phrase epitomizes “**the middle way**” between the attachment to sensual pleasures and the devotion of self-mortification. While attachment to sensual pleasures weakens *the mind* and enslaves it to the body, devotion to self-mortification weakens the body, even destroys it; hence, is of no service to the mind in the spiritual quest.

The middle way works with *a healthy mind in a healthy body*. First, we build a foundation of boundless joy that *frees the body* from enslavement to the physical senses (sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches). Then, we *free the mind* by seeing its true nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. This, in simple terms, is the middle way leading to full awakening, nirvana.

2.1.3 The (Kassapa) Jinna Sutta (S 16.5)

2.1.3.1 In **the (Kassapa) Jinnā Sutta (S 16.5)**, we find two occurrences of *pacchimā janatā* in close sequence. The Sutta records Mahā Kassapa as having long lived as a forest dweller, an almsfood eater, a rag-robe wearer, a triple-robe user, one of few wishes, contented, living in seclusion, aloof from society, and who exerts effort in the spiritual life, and praises all these practices. When the Buddha asks Kassapa about the benefit of such strict practices of his, he replies that he sees their 2 benefits (*attha, vasa*):

“For myself, I see them as a pleasant dwelling here and now, and I’m being compassionate to posterity, thinking: ‘Surely posterity will emulate my example ...’”

Attano ca diṭṭha, dhamma, sukha, vihāraṃ sampassamāno pacchimaṃ janataṃ anukampamāno appevanāma pacchimā janatā diṭṭhānugatiṃ āpajjeyyūṃ. (S 16.5/2:203), SD 96.10¹³

¹⁰ Further see SD 55.2 (2.4).

¹¹ See M 85,9.2+n (SD 55.2).

¹² See M 85,30.2+n (SD 55.2).

¹³ On *diṭṭhānugati* as meaning “emulate my example,” see S 2:203; M 1:16; A 1:126, 3:108, 251, 422; Pug 33; DhA 4:39. S:W mistranslates the embedded quote as “For surely these may fall into error,” misconstruing *diṭṭhānugati* to be resolved as *diṭṭhi* (wrong view) + *anugati*. The context, however, clearly favours it as *diṭṭha*, “the seen,” ie, he is *seen* as an example to be emulated: besides S 16.5/2:203,6 (SD 96.10), see **M 4,2.3/1:16,28** (SD 44.3) and see (2.1.4) for such passages in the Aṅguttara.

Mahā Kassapa, in short, hopes to inspire posterity—here meaning those “disciples after the Buddha” (*buddhānubuddha, sāvaka*) will live the forest life just as he has. Hence, austere elderly Kassapa is **the foremost of forest-dwelling monastics** who keeps to the strictest of spiritual living. Kassapa, then, is the exemplar of the true early monastic: one who refuses being entitled in any way but to celebrate the profound joy of the minimal and simplest life in samsara—he was clearly the greatest of **natural saints** in every good sense of the term. Even this is for the benefit for posterity.¹⁴

2.1.3.2 The Commentary makes no comment on these sentences. The final verb *āpajjeyyūṃ*, “they would commit (themselves) to” (following Be and Se) is plural but Ce reads *āpajjeyya* (potential singular, “one should undergo”). Such a grammatical technicality reflects the inadequacy of language rather than the coherence of the Dharma. Technically, the plural *āpajjeyyūṃ*, modifying *pacchimā janatā*, is grammatically preferable, and the singular *āpajjeyya* was probably a scribal error due to its proximity with the singular *diṭṭhānugatiṃ* which it can also modify.¹⁵

However, either way, the English translation is able to accommodate both peculiarities by conveying to us the spirit of the passage: “posterity will emulate (Mahā Kassapa) as an example” (*pacchimā janatā diṭṭhānugatiṃ āpajjeyyūṃ*). Notice here that using the future “will” here conveys the strength of the Pali phrase better than the technically more correct “would” or “should.” This is a case of idiomatic translation, not merely a “word exchange” or literal translation that does not convey the Pali sense.

2.1.4 Some Ānguttara passages

2.1.4.0 Here we will look at passages in the Ānguttara Nikāya which has the phrase *pacchimā janatā* and briefly examine their respective contexts for a better understanding of their usage and connotations. These are the relevant passages we will examine in this connection:

- (1) **The Jigucchitabba Sutta** (A 3.27/1:126,19 f + 1:127,22 f), SD 72.1:
kiñcāpi bhikkhave evarūpassa puggalassa na diṭṭhānugatiṃ āpajjati.
- (2) **The Anagāta, bhaya Sutta 3** (A 5.79/3:108,5 f), SD 51.29:
tesaṃ pacchimā janatā diṭṭhānugatiṃ apajjissati.
- (3) **The Gīta-s, sara Sutta** (A 5.209/3:251,8), SD 51.23(2.1):
pacchimā janatā diṭṭhānugatiṃ apajjati.
- (4) **The (Chakka) Mitta Sutta** (A 6.67/3:422,10+19), SD 64.19:
tesañ ca diṭṭhānugatiṃ apajjamāno x2.

2.1.4.1 The Jigucchitabba Sutta (A 3.27) has the phrase, “even though one does not emulate the example of such a person” (*kiñcāpi bhikkhave evarūpassa puggalassa na diṭṭhānugatiṃ āpajjati*), given on two contradicting situations regarding the kind of person we associate with.

In the first case, when one associates with someone who is “immoral, of bad character, impure, of suspect conduct, secretive in his actions, not an ascetic though claiming to be one, not a celibate though claiming to be one, inwardly rotten, corrupt, depraved,”¹⁶ even though one does not emulate the exam-

¹⁴ See esp **Mahā, kassapa-t, thera, gāthā** (Tha 1051-1090). The Buddha, too, lives a solitary life (but less isolated than Mahā Kassapa, out of compassion for posterity: see SD 55.2 (2.3.2.2) n.

¹⁵ See eg Comy gloss *sa janatā diṭṭhānugatiṃ apajjati* as “one would practise emulating such a vision” *dassanā-nugatiṃ paṭipajjati* (MA 1:111,26).

¹⁶ *Dussīlo hoti papa, dhammo asuci, saṅkassara, samācaro paṭicchanna, kammanto assamaṇo samaṇa, paṭiñño abrahma, cārī brahmacārī, paṭiñño anti, pūti avassuto kasambu, jāto.*

ple of such a person, one's reputation is soiled thereby just like a snake that has crawled through dung, though it does not bite one, it will still soil one.¹⁷

On the other hand, when one associates with morally virtuous, of good character, even though one does not emulate the example of such a person, one's reputation is thereby enhanced.¹⁸

2.1.4.2 The Anagāta,bhaya Sutta 3 (A 5.79) gives 5 signs marking the spiritual decline of the sangha. In the 5th and last of these danger signs, the Buddha warns against monks and elders who “being undeveloped in body, in moral virtue, in mind (mental cultivation), in wisdom, are luxurious and lax, led by backsliding, neglecting the task of solitude, not exerting effort in the attaining of the unattained, in the achieving of the unachieved, in the realizing of the unrealized. **Posterity will follow their example.**”¹⁹

In simple terms, this means that when monastics fail to cultivate the 3 trainings in moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, they become strong in worldly ways but weak spiritually so that they do not properly meditate, are unable to attain dhyanas, to gain even streamwinning, to become path-learners, and fail to attain nirvana. The new generation will only follow their bad example and posterity will only hasten this spiritual degeneration.

2.1.4.3 The Gīta-s,sara Sutta (A 5.209) preserves the Buddha's warnings of the 5 dangers in reciting the Dharma in a long-drawn, song-like intonation.²⁰ The 5 dangers in reciting the Dharma with a long-drawn musical sound are as follows:

- (1) One becomes infatuated with the sound itself.
- (2) Others become infatuated with the sound itself.
- (3) Householders (will) complain, “Just as we sing, so, too, do these recluses, the sons of the Sakyas!”
- (4) There is a disruption in mental concentration for one desiring to refine the sound.
- (5) **Posterity will follow one's example.** (*pacchimā janatā diṭṭhānugatim apajjati*)²¹

2.1.4.4 The (Chakka) Mitta Sutta (A 6.67) is a short, simple but instructive discourse on the dangers of bad friendship and the benefits of spiritual friendship. Basically, when we have **bad friends**, we tend to follow their example. **Following their example** (*tesañ ca diṭṭhānugatim apajjamāno*), we will surely fail in our “duties of proper conduct” (*abhisamācārika dhamma*), which is the most basic of monastic training, beginning with the 5-year tutelage (*nissaya*).²²

The same phrase is used in the second section of the Sutta—on the wholesome deed of having spiritual friends. Having spiritual friends and following their example, we are able to fulfil our “duties of proper conduct,” which in turn moves us on to fulfil the “duties of a learner.” As a learner,²³ we are strong enough to keep to all the precepts. This growing moral virtue further allows us to abandon sensual lust, and in due course even abandon lust for form existence and for formless existence. We are on the way to full awakening.

¹⁷ A 3.27/1:126,19 f (SD 72.1).

¹⁸ A 3.27/1:127,22 f (SD 72.1).

¹⁹ *Te abhāvita,kāyā samānā abhāvita,silā abhāvita.cittā abhāvita,paññā, therā bhikkhu bāhulikā bhavissanti sāthalikā okkamane pubbaṅgamā paviveke nikkhitta,dhurā na viriyam ārabhissanti appattassa pattiyā anadhigatassa adhigamāya asacchikatassa sacchikiriya, tesam pacchimā janatā diṭṭhānugatim apajjissati* (A 5.79/3:108,5 f), SD 77.17. For an abridged tr, see SD 1.10 (3.3).

²⁰ *Āyatakaṇa gīta-s,sarena dhammam bhaṇantassa*. The origin story behind the Buddha's promulgation of the rule prohibiting such as recitation is given in Cv 5.3.1-2 (V 2:108,5-25).

²¹ (A 5.209/3:251,8), SD 51.23(1.2). On related future dangers, see **Anāgata,bhaya S** (A 5.79), SD 77.17.

²² On the nissaya, see SD 40a.8 (4.2.2.3).

²³ Learner (*sekha*), those on the path of awakening, ie, the streamwinner, the once-returned and the non-returned.

2.1.4.5 THE (CHAKKA) MITTA SUTTA (A 6.67) FOR THE LAITY. For a **lay person**, this training refers to the basic observance of **the 5 precepts** against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. These precepts remind us of the values of life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom. Their greatest value lies in cultivating our body (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touch) so that they do not distract our mind from seeing their **impermanence**.

When we make every effort to keep the precepts—and we also constantly reflect on impermanence—then, even when we are morally weak, we will have enough strength to gain **streamwinning**. This only can happen when we keep to the teaching, that is, aspire for streamwinning.²⁴ Cultivating lovingkindness further helps us keep the precepts, making it easier for us to attain streamwinning.

Once we have gained streamwinning, we become a true **learner** (*sekha*) who is walking the path of awakening, the foundation of which is moral virtue. Then, our moral training (*sīla, sikkhā*) truly starts: we are spiritually strong enough so that we will never deliberately break the precepts. Our **moral strength** makes it easier for us to meditate, or at least to look deeper into the true reality of impermanence. As this insight wisdom grows, we see our sensual lust (attachment to the body and to this world) weakening. We are well moving up the path of awakening.²⁵

2.2 ABHIRŪHATU OR AKKAMATU

2.2.1 The two texts

2.2.1.1 Both **the Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 2:92) and **the Cela, pattikā Vatthu** (V 2:128) relate how prince Bodhi thrice invites the Buddha to step on the white cloth he has had laid out on the palace floor. Prince Bodhi's words in the 2 texts are as follows:

- **Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85): *abhirūhatu bhante bhagavā dussāni* (M 2:92,24+26 etc);
- **Cela, pattikā Vatthu** (Cv 5.21.1-4): *akkamatu bhante bhagavā dussābi* (V 2:128,22+16 etc).

2.2.1.2 In both cases, these lines can and have been translated identically as: “**May the Blessed One step on the cloth, bhante!**” However, technically, the 2 words—*abhirūhatu* and *akkamatu*—have their own nuances.

2.2.2 Nuances

2.2.2.1 **The Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85) records prince Bodhi as using the verb *abhirūhatu* [2.2.1.1], which is in the imperative mood (expressing a request or command). Its “normal,” that is, the present indicative, form is *abhirūhati* (less commonly, *abhiruhati*; sometimes wrongly as *abiruyhati*²⁶), “to ascend, mount; to step upon.”²⁷ The verb *abhi-rūhati* is resolved as *abhi* (here with the sense of “up”) + *rūhati* (from √RUH, to ascend, climb). Most common is the form *abhirūhati*; *abhiruhati* is usually found in poetry (such as Thī 378). It can mean “mount” (verb) as in mounting an elephant (*hatthi*) (MA 3:16,14) or a chariot (*ratha*) (J 3:476,27).

2.2.2.2 **The Cela, pattikā Vatthu** (Cv 5.21.1-4) records prince Bodhi as using the verb *akkamatu* [2.2.1.1], which is the imperative form of *akkamati* (*ā* + √KRAM, to go), (1) “to step, tread upon, press

²⁴ See eg the case of Sarakāṇi: **Sarakāṇi S 1** (S 55.24), SD 3.6. See SD 55.2 (2.8.5.2).

²⁵ A 6.67/3:422,10+19 (SD 64.19).

²⁶ On *abhiruyhati*, see Trenckner Notes p78.

²⁷ M 1:149,5, 2:92,24; Tha 271; J 3:122,29.

on.”²⁸ While *abhirūhati* has a specific sense of “to ascend; to step upon,” *akkamati* includes a few other senses, that is, (2) to give a kick (at someone or something),²⁹ and (3) to attack, assail.³⁰

2.2.2.3 From our very brief survey (despite its brevity), we can see that the two words *akkamati* and *abhirūhati* can be synonymous. In our text, the Majjhima reciters used *abhirūhati*, while the Vinaya reciters used *akkamati*. **The Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Vatthu** (DhA 3:136) also uses the future tense (*akkamissati*) and aorist (past tense) (*akkamīṭṭha*) of *akkamati*.

Either way—despite the two different Pali readings—they both translate as “step (on)” in English. Hence, this is only a Pali philological curiosity, but poses no difficulty in the English version.

2.3 ANUKAMPATI OR APALOKETI

2.3.1 Pali readings

2.3.1.1 In the **Cela,pattikā Vatthu** (Cv 5.21.1-4), the “story of the cloth-strips,” Ānanda (at the signal) explains to prince Bodhi that the Buddha will not step on the white cloth spread because “**The Tathāgata regards posterity with compassion**” (*pacchimarā janatarā tathāgato anukampatīti*) [§23]. This reading is identical with the Burmese reading of the same line in same account in **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85).³¹

2.3.1.2 In the **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** parallel passage (M 85,23), only the Burmese reading—the same as the Vinaya reading here [2.1.1]—is *anukampati*. However, all the other manuscripts (the European (PTS), the Sinhala and the Siamese) instead use the verb *apalokesi* (aor), “he looked (at), regarded.” Clearly, from the context, the Buddha is “thinking,” that is “regarding,” how future generations (that is, whoever comes after, including us) would view the Buddha’s response to this matter of his stepping on the white cloths.³²

2.3.2 “The Blessed One looked at the venerable Ānanda”

2.3.2.1 One of the most fascinating, if not enigmatic, moments in the story of prince Bodhi and the white cloths—as related in **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85) and **the Cela,pattikā Vatthu** (Cv 5.21)—is when the Buddha, standing silently, declining to step on the white cloths that prince Bodhi has spread out all over the floor of Kokanada palace, looks silently at Ānanda, who seems to know just what to do, as if he has read the Buddha’s mind.

The Pali simply says: “**Then, the Blessed One looked at the venerable Ānanda**” (*atha kho bhagavā āyasmantarā ānandarā apalokesi*). Ananda then explains to prince Bodhi that the Buddha will not be stepping on the white-cloth spreads: “The Tathagata regards posterity with compassion” (*pacchimā janatā tathāgato apaloketi/anukampati*) [2.3.1].

²⁸ M 2:93,2 ≈ DhA 3:136,21; J 3:374,7’, 4:206,9*, 5:433,30, 6:126,10*. See DP: akkamati.

²⁹ V 3:38,33 + Comy. See CPD: akkamati.

³⁰ SnA 353,13.

³¹ See §12 n in the sutta below. For further discussion, see SD 55.2 (2.3).

³² Further see SD 55.2 (2.3).

2.3.2.2 As a rule, monastics when “amongst houses” (*antara,ghare*), that is, in public or amongst the laity, will be “mindful, with downcast eyes” (*okkhita,cakkhu satimā*), or “with downcast eyes, mindful,”³³ as in the cases of the newly renounced Bodhisattva as described in **the Pabbajjā Sutta** (Sn 3.1)³⁴ and also the elder Assaji when the wanderer Sāriputta first saw him.³⁵

When the Buddha silently stands before the palace stairway, not stepping on the white cloth spread out before him, he thus mindfully stands with downcast eyes. However, after prince Bodhi has invited him thrice to step on the cloths, the Buddha then looks at Ānanda without saying a word. We are not told anywhere in the suttas or Commentaries that Ānanda is able to read minds, clearly not the Buddha’s mind.

2.3.2.3 Hence, we must conclude that the elder Ānanda, a streamwinner then, is wise enough to discern the situation, and being himself wise in the Dharma, he knows just what to royally say to prince Bodhi. It is unlikely that, at that time, Ānanda would have known then that Bodhi wants to have a child.

It is, however, possible that the Buddha could have asked Ānanda to come up to him and quietly tell him what to say. However, this is unlikely since we have no precedent for such a gesture. On the other hand, for Bodhi to have taken the trouble to spread white cloths all over the palace floor in the hope that the Buddha will step on it, blessing him with a dearly wanted child, means that this quaint ritual is part of the prevalent folklore.

2.3.2.4 By diplomatically telling prince Bodhi that “**The Tathāgata regards posterity with compassion**” [2.3.1.1] clearly precludes embarrassment for both the Buddha and the prince. In other words, the Buddha not stepping on the cloths is nothing “personal” against Bodhi. The Buddha is simply setting the precedent that no monastic needs to do so in such a circumstance.

However, at the end of the Vinaya account, it is recorded that, when the laity complained of not being blessed with good fortune, the Buddha—while stating that the laity are “bent on good fortune” (a euphemism for their being superstitious)—the Buddha, in his compassion, “allows” (*anujānāmi*) monastics to oblige the laity.

Yet, as far as this rule goes—“I allow, bhikshus, when beseeched by householders, for the sake of good fortune, (you) to step on a cloth-spread” [§34]—it is *not* a rule of commission (that a monastic *must* abide by it) but a rule of latitude: it is up to the monastic to see the wisdom or compassion of such an act. Before any such choice is made, we should clearly understand both the spirit of the Dhamma—from **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85)—and the spirit of the Vinaya—from **the Cela,pattikā Vatthu** (Cv 2.5.-21.1-2).

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³³ In the Pātimokkha, Sekhiya 7 says: “I shall go with downcast eyes amongst the houses (in the village, etc): this is a training to be done” (*okkhitta,cakkhu antara,ghare gamissāmīti sikkhā karaṇīyā*) (V 4:186,29 f).

³⁴ Sn 411a (SD 49.19).

³⁵ Mv 1.23.2 (V 1:39,35).

Cela,pattikā Vatthu

The case of the cloth-strips

Cv 5.21.1-4

|| Cv 5.21 ||

1 Then, the Blessed One, having stayed in Vesālī for as long as he was inclined, set out on a walk for Bhagga country.³⁶ Walking in stages, in due course, the Blessed One arrived in Bhagga country.

2 There, in Bhagga country, the Blessed One stayed in the deer park³⁷ in Bhesakaḷā Forest at Suṃsumāra,giri.

Prince Bodhi invites the Buddha to Kokanada

3 Now at that time, prince Bodhi's palace, called **Kokanada**, was yet uninhabited by any recluse or brahmin or human.³⁸

4 Then, prince Bodhi addressed the brahmin youth **Sañjikā,putta**.³⁹

"Come, now, dear Sañjikā,putta, go to the Blessed One and bow your head at the Blessed One's feet on my behalf, and ask after his health, that he has good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort;⁴⁰ saying:

'Bhante, prince Bodhi bows his head at the Blessed One's feet, and asks after your health, that you have good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort.⁴¹

5 Then say:

'Bhante, let the Blessed One together with the sangha of monks consent to accept tomorrow's meal from prince Bodhi.'"

6 "Yes, sir," replied the brahmin youth Sañjikā,putta, and he went to the Blessed One and exchanged friendly words and cordial greetings⁴² with him. When the friendly greetings were concluded, the brahmin youth Sañjikā,putta sat down at one side.⁴³

³⁶ This account (V 2:127,13-128,37) recurs, with minor variations, in **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85,1-9.1/2:91,2-93,11), SD 55.2,

³⁷ "Deer park," *miga,dāya*: see **M 85,1** (SD 55.2) for nn in this para.

³⁸ Hereon, a similar account is given in **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra V** (DhA 12.1), highlighted by the Buddha uttering **Dh 157** (SD 55.4).

³⁹ *Sañjikā,putta māṇava*: see SD 55.2 (4).

⁴⁰ *Ehi tvaṃ samma sañjikā,putta yena bhagavā ten'upasaṅkama, upasaṅkamtivā mama vacanena bhagavato pāde sirasā vanda* [only here (in this V account & M 85,3, SD 55.2) *vanda*; all other stocks, *vandāhi*], *appābādham appātākaṃ lahuṭṭhānaṃ balaṃ phāsuvihāraṃ puccha*, lit "ask (if) he is free from sickness, free from illness, in a state of lightness, having strength, dwelling in comfort." This is stock: see foll n.

⁴¹ This is stock: **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,1.2/2:72), SD 9 (king Ajāta,sattu to Vassa,kāra); **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85,3/2:91), SD 55.2; **Piya,jātika S** (M 87,6/2:108), SD 84.11 (queen Mallikā to brahmin Nāḷi,jaṅgha); **Kaṇṇaka-ṭṭhala S** (M 90,2.2/2:125), SD 10.8 (king Pasenadi to a man); **(Sattaka) Vassa,kāra S** (A 7.20/4:17), SD 72.14; **Suppavāsa S** (U 15). See prec n.

⁴² *Sammodiṃsu sammodaniyaṃ kathāṃ sārāṇiyaṃ vītisāretvā*, lit "they greeted (the Blessed One); having exchanged complimentary talk that gladdens ... " The phrase *sammodiṃsu sammodaniyaṃ kathāṃ sārāṇiyaṃ vītisāreti* is stock: D 1:52, 90, 118, 152; M 1:16 (*anussariyamāna,sukhato sārāṇiyaṃ*, "'gladdening,' on account of recollecting happiness," MA 1:110); A 1:55, 281, 2:42; Sn 419; (cf BHS *saṃmukhaṃ saṃmodaniṃ saṃrañjanīṃ vividhāṃ kathāṃ vyatisārya*, Divy 43.8, 47.19, 96.26, 318.16; *saṃmodaniṃ saṃrañjanīṃ vividhāṃ kathāṃ vyatisāryaikānte 'sthāt*, Avdś 1.229, 2:140); *sārāṇiyaṃ kathāṃ katheti*, DhA 1:107.4:87; (cf BHS *saṃrañjanīyaṃ dharmāṃ samādāya*, Divy 260.7).

⁴³ On this stock, see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,1.9), SD 21.3.

The Buddha consents

7 Sitting at one side, the brahmin youth Sañjikā,putta said to the Blessed One:

“Master Gotama,⁴⁴ prince Bodhi, bows his head at the Blessed One’s feet, and asks after your health, that you have good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort.

And he said thus:

‘Bhante, may the Blessed One together with the sangha of monks consent to accept tomorrow’s meal from prince Bodhi.’⁴⁵”

8 The Blessed One consented by his silence.⁴⁶ || 1 ||

9 Then, the brahmin youth Sañjikā,putta, knowing that the Blessed One had consented, rose from his seat and approached prince Bodhi. **[128]**

10 Going up to prince Bodhi, he said:

“It has been conveyed to the Blessed One that *prince Bodhi [M 2:92] bows at master Gotama’s feet and asks after his health, that he has good health, mental ease, vigour, strength and comfort.*”⁴⁷

11 And when this was said:

‘*May the Blessed One together with the sangha of monks consent to accept tomorrow’s meal from prince Bodhi,*’ the recluse Gotama consented.

The Buddha arrives at the palace

12 With the passing of the night, prince Bodhi had prepared exquisite food, hard and soft, in his own residence, had Kokanada palace spread with white cloths down to the last step of the stairway.⁴⁸

13 Then, he addressed the brahmin youth Sañjikā,putta:

“Come, now, dear Sañjikā,putta, go to the Blessed One and announce the time:

‘It’s time, bhante, the meal is ready.’”

14 “Yes, sir,” replied the brahmin youth Sañjikā,putta.

He approached the Blessed One and announced the time:

‘*It’s time, bhante, the meal is ready.*’”

15 When it was dawn, the Blessed One, having dressed himself, taking robe and bowl, went to prince Bodhi’s residence.

The Buddha’s silence

16 At that time, prince Bodhi was standing at the porch of the outer gateway, waiting for the Blessed One.

He saw the Blessed One coming from afar. Seeing him, he went out towards the Blessed One, saluted him. Then, he let the Blessed One go before him, and head for Kokanada palace.

17 But the Blessed One stopped at the lowest step of the stairway.

⁴⁴ *Bodhi kho gotama raja,kumaro.* For *kho*, **D 85,3.4** (SD 55.2) has *vi bho*.

⁴⁵ *Adhivāsetu kira bhavaṃ gotamo bodhissa rāja,kumārassa svātanāya bhattaṃ saddhiṃ bhikkhu,saṅghenāti.*

⁴⁶ *Adhivuṭṭhañ ca pana samaṇena gotamenāti*, lit, “And consent (was given) by the recluse Gotama.”

⁴⁷ As at (**Majjhima**) **Subha S** (D 10,1.2/1:204 etc), SD 40a.13; (**Majjhima**) **Lohicca S** (D 12,4+5/1:225), SD 34.8.

⁴⁸ “... had Kokanada palace ... of the stairway,” *kokanadañ ca pāsādaṃ odātehi dussehi santharāpetvā yāva pacchimā sopāna,kaliṅgarā* [M 85/2:92,9 *sopāna,kaḷevarā*, SD 55.2].

18 Prince Bodhi then said to the Blessed One:

“May the Blessed One step on⁴⁹ the cloths, bhante!⁵⁰ May the Welcome One [Sugata] step on the cloths, for my good and happiness for a long time!”

19 When this was said, the Blessed One remained silent.

20 For a second time, *prince Bodhi said to the Blessed One:*

“May the Blessed One step on the cloths, bhante! May the Welcome One [Sugata] step on the cloths, for my good and happiness for a long time!”

When this was said, the Blessed One remained silent.

21 For a third time, *prince Bodhi said to the Blessed One:*

“May the Blessed One step on the cloths, bhante! May the Welcome One [Sugata] step on the cloths, for my good and happiness for a long time!”⁵¹

22 Then, the Blessed One looked⁵² at the venerable Ānanda.⁵³

23 Thereupon, [M 2:93] the venerable Ānanda said to prince Bodhi:

“Noble prince, let the cloths be removed. The Blessed One will not step on the cloth-covering.⁵⁴ **The Tathagata regards posterity with compassion.**⁵⁵ || 2 ||

The Buddha in Kokanada palace

24 Prince Bodhi, having accordingly had the cloths removed, had seats prepared on the upper floor of Kokanada palace.

Then, the Blessed One, along with the community of monks, ascended Kokanada palace and sat on the prepared seats.

25 Prince Bodhi served with his own hands, foods hard and soft, and satisfied the community of monks with the Buddha at the head.

26 When the Blessed One had finished his meal, and washed his bowl and hands,⁵⁶ prince Bodhi, taking a low seat, sat down at one side.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ “May ... step on,” Be *abhiruhatu*; Ce Ee Se *abhirūhatu*; V 2:128,22+26 *akkamatu*. At M 2:93,2, all MSS read *ce-lapa(t)tikam akkamissati* [§7.7]. **Abhirūhatu**, imp of *abhirūhati* (less commonly, *abhiruhati*), to ascend, mount; to step upon (M 1:149,5, 2:92,24; Tha 271; J 3:122,29). **Akkamatu**, imp of *akkamati* (*ā* + √KRAM, to go), “to step or tread upon” (M 2:93,2 ≈ DhA 3:136,21; J 3:374,7’, 4:206,9*, 5:433,30, 6:126,10*); see CPD: *abhirūhati*; *akkamati*. On *abhiruhatu* and *akkamatu*, further see SD 55.3 (2.2).

⁵⁰ *Akkamatu bhante bhagavā dussāni akkamatu sugato dussāni*. See prec n.

⁵¹ On the significance of this moment, see SD 55.2 (2.1).

⁵² “Looked at,” *apalokesi* (V 2:128,27 + all M 85 MSS), lit, “(turned the head or body and) looked at”; DhA 12.1/-3:136,9 has only *olokesi*, “looked (at).” Cf *nāgāpalokitam*, “looked with an elephant gaze” (ie, turned the whole body to face the other): **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,4.1/2:122,5) n, SD 9; of Kakusandha Buddha (at Dūsi Māra) (M 50,21/1:337,3), SD 36.4. For further discussion on the white cloth and the Buddha’s silence, see SD 55.3 (2.2).

⁵³ *Atha kho bhagavā āyasmantaṃ ānandaṃ apalokesi*. On the significance of this gesture, see SD 55/3 (2.3.2).

⁵⁴ *Samharatu rāja,kumāra dussāni, na bhagavā cela,pattikam* [so Be Se so; Ce Ee V 2:128,29 DhA 3:136,11; only Be *cela,pātikam*] *akkamissati*.

⁵⁵ *Pacchimaṃ janataṃ tathāgato anukampatīti*. In **M 85,7.8**, only Be reads *anukampati*, while the other MSS have *apalokesi* (SD 55.2). Although *anukampati* (“has pity or compassion towards”) seems to be a better reading, the older or original reading is prob *apaloketi*, since this is the more “difficult” reading—lectio difficilior potior [SD 54.6 (2.3.3.2)]. However, M 4 & A 2.3.9, with a similar reading confirms *janataṃ ... anukampati* as the better reading: SD 55.2 (2.3.2.2). On the phrase, see further SD 55.2 (2.1).

⁵⁶ *Atha kho bodhi rāja,kumāro bhagavantaṃ bhuttāvim onīta,patta,pāṇim*. “Washed his bowl and hands,” **onīta,-patta,pāṇim**, stock signifying the end of a monk’s almsmeal: **D 16/2:88,24, 97,32; M 35/1:236,31, 58/1:393,30, 81/-2:50,20, 85/2:93,10, 92/2:146 (=Sn p111,8), 127/3:145,25; S 35.133/4:122,19, 123,27, 55.26/5:384,19; A 4.57/2:63,-3, 5.33/3:37,10, 7.53/4:64,23, 8.12/4:188,10; U 4.3/38,34, 8.6/89,16; Sn 3.7/p111,8**. It is sometimes tr as “(having)

27 Then, to prince Bodhi sitting at one side, [129] the Blessed One instructed, inspired, roused and gladdened him with a Dharma-talk.⁵⁸ Then, having done so, he rose from his seat and left.

THE VINAYA RULES

28 Then, the Blessed One, on that occasion, in this connection, having given a Dharma-based talk, addressed the monks, thus:

29 **“Bhikshus, you should not step on a cloth-covering. For whomever does so, there is an offence of wrong-doing.”**⁵⁹ || 3 ||

For the laypeople’s blessing

30 Now, at that time, a certain woman who had had a miscarriage, having had cloth prepared, invited the monks, spoke thus:

“Bhantes, please step on the cloth!”

The monks, being scrupulous, did not step on it.

31 She said: “Bhantes, please step on the cloth for the sake of good fortune!”

The monks, being scrupulous, did not step on it.

32 Then, the woman spread it about, saying:

“How can these noble ones, despite being beseeched for the sake of good fortune, not step on the cloth?”

33 The monks heard this woman spread this about. They told this matter to the Blessed One.

34 He said: “The laity, bhikshus, are bent on good fortune [superstitious].⁶⁰ **I allow, bhikshus, when beseeched by householders, for the sake of good fortune, (you) to step on a cloth-spread.**”⁶¹ || 4a ||

After the feet have been washed

35 Now at that time, monks are doubtful about stepping on clean cloth (for drying the feet).⁶² They told this matter to the Blessed One.

withdrawn his (the Buddha’s) hand from the bowl,” esp when preceded by *dhota,hattham*, as in V 1:244: *bhagavan-tam dhota,hattham onīta,patta,pāṇim*, “the Blessed One washed his hands, and withdrew his hand from the bowl” (V 1:244 §13.2 @ SD 45.7b). It is understood that he would have put aside his bowl. See important long n at Sn:N 281 ad Sn p111 (§25.4); also S:B 1418 n135. See CPD: *onīta-patta-pāṇi* & DPL: *onīta*.

⁵⁷ **M 85** (§9.1) adds: “Prince Bodhi, *taking a low seat*, sat down at one side.” Hereon, **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85,9.1/2:93,11) continues differently (SD 55.2).

⁵⁸ “Having instructed ... gladdened ... with a Dharma-talk, *sandassetvā samādapetvā samuṭṭejetvā sampahamsetvā*: this is stock: V 1:18; D 1:126, 149, 2:86, 98, 109, 110, 127, 3:27, 209; M 1:209, 354, 2:139, 3:155; S 2:215, 3:95, 4:183, 5:155; A 3:380, 4:67, 118, 307 (x2), 5:122, 125; U 39, 82, 87. On the stages of teachings, see SD 11.4 (4.3).

⁵⁹ *Na bhikkhave cela,pattikā akkamitabbā, yo akkameyya dukkaṭassāti*. Qu at MA 3:323. Comy says that the Buddha laid down this rule in case a monk should tread on one, not knowing whether the householder would have a child or not; and that he did it to safeguard the monks from the householders’ contempt should there not be a child after they had trodden on the cloth-spread. (VA 1209)

⁶⁰ *Gīhi bhikkhave maṅgalikā*, lit “Householders, monks, are fortune-bent.” PED: “superstitious, looking out for lucky signs” (said of householders: V 2:129, 140).

⁶¹ *Anujānāmi bhikkhave gihīnaṃ maṅgal’atṭhaya yāciyamānena cela,pattikam akkamitun’ti*. (V 2:129,15-17)

⁶² *Tena kho pana samayena bhikkhu dhota,pādakaṃ akkamituṃ kukkucāyanti*. Comy explains *dhota,pādaka* as “that which is suitable for stepping on, a cloth-spread laid out for the purpose of stepping on (to dry the feet) after

He said: “I allow, bhikshus, the stepping on clean cloth (for drying the feet after washing).”⁶³ || 4b ||

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washing the feet in a place for foot-washing” (*dhota,pādakan* nāma pāda,dhovana-ṭ,ṭhāne dhotēhi pādehi akkama-
n’atthāya paccattharaṇaṃ atthataṃ hoti, taṃ akkamituṃ vaṭṭati, VA 1209,24-26).

⁶³ *Anujānāmi bhikkhave dhota,pādakaṃ akkamituṃ’ti.* (V 2:129,19)